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Ministry of Forests and Range

LOWER SIMILKAMEEN BAND SIGNS FORESTRY AGREEMENT

VICTORIA – The Lower Similkameen Indian Band will benefit from a $1.1-million, five-year forestry agreement with the Province, Forests and Range Minister Rich Coleman announced today.

"Through these forest and range agreements, government is creating more diversity in the forest sector," Coleman said. "This agreement provides a foundation for the Lower Similkameen Indian Band to explore new economic opportunities for its members."

Under the forest and range agreement, the Lower Similkameen will receive access to 67,500 cubic metres in the Okanagan Timber Supply Area once the provincewide timber reallocation process is complete. Under the Forestry Revitalization Plan, the Province committed to reallocate timber to communities, woodlot operators and First Nations to diversify the forest economy and provide local economic opportunities.

Depending on future decisions on annual allowable cuts as a result of the mountain pine beetle epidemic, the band may also have access to an additional 53,490 cubic metres from the Okanagan, Merritt or Boundary timber supply areas.

"This agreement is a significant step forward in our economic future," Chief Joseph Dennis said. "We will operate this forestry operation based on our traditional respect for the land and all it supports."

The band has 444 members on nine reserves near Keremeos. It is the 99th First Nation to negotiate a forestry-related agreement with the Province.

Since September 2002, the Minister of Forests and Range has signed agreements with 99 First Nations to provide access to over 15.7 million cubic metres of timber and to share forestry revenues of $114.5 million.

Over the past four years, the Province has worked with First Nations to provide economic growth and opportunities, especially in traditional areas such as forestry. Government is committed to strengthening relationships with First Nations based on reconciliation, recognition and constructive consultation on social and economic issues.

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Media contact: Max Cleeveley
Communications Director
Ministry of Forests and Range
250 387-8486

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